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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: TARGETED KILLINGS FEED CLIMATE OF FEAR AND
MISTRUST IN THAILAND,S DEEP SOUTH

REF: A. BANGKOK 618 (GRISLY INCIDENTS)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 124 (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL)

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Classified By: Charge a.i. James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Targeted killings of religious leaders, former detainees, alleged informants and collaborators, and human rights activists, with both security forces and insurgents to blame for cases that usually go unsolved, are exacerbating an environment of distrust and fear in Thailand's deep South. It remains unclear whether murders suspected of being associated with counterinsurgency efforts -- such as 16 imams since 2004 -- are carried out by figures associated with the military, the police, paramilitary forces, or with other unidentified affiliations. Meanwhile, the March 12 shooting of a female Muslim human rights activist by suspected insurgents in broad daylight, in front of witnesses, is a reminder that the insurgents continue to murder fellow Malay Muslims when they believe it will further their cause. Amnesty International issued a statement April 1 criticizing the insurgents for a series of targeted killings of civilians.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Many citizens in the deep south are caught in a climate of fear stoked by actions by both security forces and separatists. Most of the victims are Muslim civilians; most are killed by insurgents. It is nearly impossible to confirm continued allegations made by NGOs, human rights activists, and independent analysts that security forces have committed a series of targeted killings. The involvement of security force elements (police) in the 2003 War on Drugs campaign which led to 1300 murders nationwide over a three month period lends credence to such concerns, though there is no evidence to suggest such actions are ordered by high-ranking officials. Community outrage over the targeting of Imams in particular undercuts the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) ability to make headway in winning the "hearts and minds" of Malay Muslim citizens in the deep south. Most Malay Muslims do not support the separatist cause, but instead seek an end to a culture of impunity for security officials and expect the RTG to use the system of justice to prosecute and convict suspected insurgents rather than

eliminate them by other means. We take allegations of targeted killings seriously and will continue to urge the RTG to investigate them and strengthen the judicial system's ability to handle insurgent-related cases. This is the first in a series of cables looking at current conditions in the deep south. End Summary and Comment.

Suspicious Pattern of Imam Shooting Deaths

¶3. (C) The long-running separatist conflict in Thailand's Malay-Muslim deep south, which dates back to 1909 but entered a much more lethal phase in January 2004, has involved a seemingly never-ending cycle of violence and grisly killings attributed to both government forces and separatists (ref A).

Over the past five years, insurgents have used a campaign of targeted killings to sow fear and mistrust in the local population, killing not only perceived agents of central Thai authority (soldiers, police, teachers, even Buddhist monks) but also Malay Muslims perceived to be collaborators with Thai officialdom (from local administrators to mere rubber tappers). Amnesty International released a statement April 1 highlighting a series of such targeted killings by insurgents since the beginning of the year.

¶4. (C) For their part, security forces are contributing to this atmosphere of fear through what appear to be a series of targeted killings of their own (from Imams to suspected militants), allege a range of credible embassy contacts who follow the situation in the deep south closely. Of most note, at least 16 Imams have been killed or injured under suspicious circumstances since 2004, the Cross Cultural Foundation (CCF) asserted to us in early March, sharing a list detailing the attacks. (Note: Thais generally use the

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term "Imam" to refer to religious leaders appointed by the Provincial Islamic Committees. CCF is a well-respected Thai NGO that registered with the RTG in 2002 and promotes intercommunal ties. End Note.) CCF told us that, prior to being targeted, the majority of the Imams listed had participated in state-sponsored re-education programs or had been summoned or arrested by security officials before being released due to lack of evidence.

¶5. (C) The most recent such incident occurred January 30, when Imam Abdulkarim Yusoh was shot in front of his mosque as he prepared for Friday prayers in Saiburi, Pattani province. His murder occurred nearly one week after he was arrested and released by state security officials; Yusoh had previously been released from prison in October 2008 after serving a one-year sentence. Two separate contacts told us that Yusoh had told many people during his most recent detention that he would be killed within a week once released. When we visited the deep south six weeks after the incident, academics in Pattani familiar with the situation told us that the mood in Saiburi remained angry, with villagers blaming authorities for the killing.

¶6. (C) We raised the Yusoh killing with Internal Security Operational Command (ISOC) officers during a visit to the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) in Yala March 18, noting how his death had inflamed local sentiment and asking whether Thai officials had determined who was responsible. ISOC Director of Intelligence COL Noppadol replied that authorities were working on three theories: internecine conflicts among insurgents; connections to drug trafficking; and forensics which indicate the casing from the bullet which killed Yusoh could be tied to a weapon used in ten other killings in the south.

¶7. (C) Human Rights Watch consultant Sunai Phasuk, who maintains good contacts with both security officials and insurgents and criticizes abuses by both sides, elaborated March 16 on two of the sixteen "Imam" cases which occurred in Pattani province over the past year and were very similar to

the Yusoh killing. A hidden gunman shot Imam Toya Masae in front of his mosque in June 2008; assailants shot Imam Muhammadsidi Pohsa in front of his home in September 2008. Sunai pointed out that both Imams had been summoned by security officials, but released due to lack of evidence. Sunai conceded that the Imams may have been sympathetic to the insurgency, but he believed they were not active supporters.

EJKs intended to Expedite Justice?

¶8. (C) There are also indications insurgents tied to specific attacks on security forces may be targeted for killing rather than arrest. Eight villagers associated with the 2005 torture and killing of two Marines in Tanyong Limo village of Ra Ngae district, Narathiwat province, have been killed since, including one who had been arrested and released on bail, according to a December 2008 press account. HRW's Sunai asserted the Tanyong Limo deaths were targeted killings by Thai security forces, although he could not identify the forces involved.

¶9. (C) A western analyst who follows the situation in the deep South closely told us in February that police had admitted to him that they had shot a local contact of the analyst's for allegedly attempting to sell a weapon to insurgents. We have no independent confirmation of this account.

Allegations that Death Sometimes Follows Re-education

¶10. (C) Human rights organizations remain concerned that suspected militants who attend military-run re-education camps on two army bases may be at greater risk of targeted killings subsequently, though by whom remains unclear. HRW Consultant Sunai told us that the re-education camps created a climate of distrust among villagers, insurgents, and the

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state, since participants exited the camps stigmatized. He suggested that some of the villagers killed after attending the camps could have been shot by security officials if the RTG feared their involvement in the insurgency would continue; others may have been shot by insurgents who feared the camps transformed them into government informers.

¶11. (C) The CCF Legal Officers shared with us copies of several different invitation letters to local residents, village leaders, and Imams who are suspected of being sympathetic towards the insurgency to attend such camp sessions. The camps' programs, which started in 2007, run for seven to 20 days. While participation is allegedly voluntary, one of the invitation letters issued by ISOC carried a warning that anyone objecting to the summons would be subjected to up to two years' imprisonment and a 40,000 baht fine.

¶12. (SBU) Working Group on Justice for Peace (WGJP), a respected organization led by Angkhana Neelapaichit, the widow of disappeared lawyer/human rights activist Somchai, released a statement on March 7 detailing the experience of one villager who participated in a week-long "Peace Project" training camp run by the ISOC for approximately 25 participants from Narathiwat province. According to the statement, soldiers told the villager that they could not guarantee his safety if he did not participate in the camp's program. The WGJP statement asserts that the same villager claimed program participants were subjected to interrogations, fingerprinting, and DNA sample collection, and they were photographed naked.

¶13. (C) CCF officials believed that suspected insurgents or insurgent sympathizers who participated in the camps were at a higher risk for being murdered, citing the case of Imam

Toya Masae (para 7) who had attended a re-education camp shortly before his death. A WGJP Program Officer told us on March 23 that WGJP had heard from villagers about several cases of people being killed following camp attendance. She noted that the villagers always blamed the authorities, but that it was "hard to confirm who is doing the killing."

Insurgents Murder a Human Rights Activist

¶14. (SBU) The insurgents, meanwhile, continue to demonstrate their ruthless nature through the use of targeted killings to sow fear and intimidation. The tragedies suffered by one family in Yala are a case in point. On March 12, prominent Muslim women's rights activist and peace advocate Laila Paaitae Daoh was shot in broad daylight in Krongpenang district, Yala province, only 100 meters from a military checkpoint. She died of her wounds the next day, becoming the fourth member of her family to be killed by suspected insurgents. Her sister, who survived the incident by playing dead, received death threats by phone during the week following Laila's shooting. Laila's husband and second son, also peace advocates, were shot in 2006, and her eldest son, a village chief, in 2004. The Paaitae Daoh family openly advocated that equality for ethnic Malay Muslims could be obtained through judicial mechanisms instead of armed struggle.

¶15. (C) Laila's death prompted HRW to issue a press release on March 18 calling for all sides to respect human rights defenders. Sunai told us on March 16 that the Paaitae Daoh family members had long received death threats from the insurgents, who considered them traitors and accused them of working for the state. Sunai added that the killing reflected the vow made by his insurgent contacts, who planned to use emotion-inducing killings such as Laila's, to create strife in communities and attempt to sever community links to the RTG. Sunai noted that the insurgents aimed to derail any attempts by the Abhisit government to project control over the southern issue. The WGJP told us on March 16 that insurgents killed Laila for her willingness to act as a bridge between the villagers in her community, both ethnic Thai Buddhists and ethnic Malay Muslims, and the RTG.

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